

# The Classical Association - Jowett Sendelar Competition 2016-17

## Report from the Judges

On behalf of the organising committee, The Classical Association and the Jowett Trustees, we offer our thanks to those teachers who support the Competition and who encourage their pupils to submit entries. Particular thanks must go, as always, to the Jowett Copyright Trustees for their essential support of the competition in both its administration and its generous prize money.

The entries for the 2016-17 Essay Competition were of a particularly high standard, and demonstrated both impressive academic rigour and a strong personal approach. The judges note that, for next year's Competition, it would be pleasing to maintain this standard while increasing the total number of entries.

According to the now well-established practice, entries were marked anonymously, with the name of each candidate being re-assigned to their script only after prizes were awarded. Each script is therefore marked on its own merits. The vast majority of entries were submitted electronically this year; this is appreciated, as it aids the judges to anonymise entries.

Please can teachers ensure that, if they do choose to enter candidates by post, they always include an appropriately-stamped SAE to ensure the safe return of entries, candidate reports, and any prizes.

Essay titles for 2017-18 are given below, and are also available from the Classical Association ([www.classicalassociation.org](http://www.classicalassociation.org)) within the newsletter 'CA News' and on its Facebook page. They can also be found on the Hellenic Society website ([www.hellenicsociety.org.uk](http://www.hellenicsociety.org.uk)) and on the Classics Library website ([www.theclassicslibrary.com](http://www.theclassicslibrary.com)).

## **JOWETT SENDELAR ESSAY COMPETITION 2016-17**

### General Remarks

- The standard of entries suggests an excellent level of subject knowledge and of literacy skills among pupils studying the ancient world.
- Entrants were, for the most part, impressively well-informed on standards of academic practice. Instances of plagiarism and of inappropriate register are now almost entirely non-existent, which is a highly encouraging picture.
- There was little evidence of over-coaching on the part of the schools: candidates produced individual, personal responses based on their own research, true to the spirit of the Competition.

- Very few candidates presented only raw factual information, instead making use of analytical argument and/or skills of creative writing to address the question on their own terms.
- In questions that involve work on a story or narrative, it is often better to present information in an order that suits the candidate's argument than to follow the chronology of the story.
- Typographical errors can be avoided through careful proof-reading, using an electronic spell-checker if necessary.
- Candidates should be advised to adhere to the word limit as much as possible.

### Section Comments

#### a) GODS

**'Ancient myths present goddesses as more unpleasant and vindictive than gods.'**

**How true do you find this statement?**

*You should use Ovid's Metamorphoses as a starting point, along with any other ancient literature you wish to choose, and consider how gods and goddesses are portrayed.*

The candidates who attempted this question clearly had no problems in finding a wealth of evidence of deities behaving badly, whatever their gender. From reading these accounts, it appears that there is not a single god or goddess free from the worst kinds of character traits. The best responses gave fascinating insights into **why** they behaved as they did, placing their behaviour in a wider moral context and subjecting their misdeeds to psychological analysis. As ever, a strong argument was the key to success here; but even those candidates who concentrated more on narrative than analysis unearthed fascinating details as a result of their rigorous research.

**Jasmin Rekhi** of **Burntwood School** put her chosen stories through the prism of a post-Freudian psychological approach: apparently innocent myths were made to reveal unpleasant secrets about the mindset of Athenian males. According to this analysis, goddesses are warnings to Athenian men about what will happen if women are given too much power; and gods are examples of male wish-fulfilment. Jasmin's brilliantly researched and quirkily argued response was as strong at giving fresh insight into familiar myths (the manly Actaeon is humiliated by being turned into a 'girly' deer) as it was at unearthing unfamiliar stories (Agnodice the medic was a revelation).

**Isabella Alcock**, also of **Burntwood**, took care to locate her answer in both an ancient and a modern context, supported by some outstanding pieces of research. By teasing out the details of the Roman crime of *stuprum*, she was able to show that even Romans would have regarded Jupiter's behaviour towards mortal women as unacceptable. Isabella saw the symbolism in her chosen myths: for example, Minerva's visit to Envy in Ovid's

Metamorphoses was taken as a metaphor for a character overwhelmed by the 'Green-Eyed Monster'.

**Lucy Barrow** (Christ's Hospital) took pains to place the representation of goddesses in its ancient context, with some very precise details that showcased her thorough reading of the original texts. This eye for detail extended into the presentation of her work: her beautifully presented, hand-produced account was illustrated with some outstanding sketches.

## **b) EPIC**

**Who best deserves the title 'hero': Achilles, Hector, or Aeneas?**

*Consider what qualities make a 'hero', and refer to events from Homer's Iliad and Virgil's Aeneid. Reach a conclusion concerning which character is the most heroic.*

'Hero' is a slippery term, and those tackling this question needed to attempt to pin it down, while at the same time getting to grips with arguably the three most daunting (and rewarding) texts from the ancient world. An additional problem is that what was heroic in the Homeric age no longer sufficed in the age of Virgil. Nevertheless, the candidates rose to this epic challenge, producing answers that sought not only to define the word 'hero' but also to home in on a range of detail from the three works.

**Alex Williams** of **Wetherby Prep School** demonstrated an excellent knowledge of the myths surrounding the three heroes: this was a candidate who really knew his material. One eminent Greek professor used to say that a true student of the ancient world had to read the works of Homer (in the original Greek!) at least once a year; on that basis, Alex is well on the way to being a true Classicist.

The competition as a whole was won by **Joseph Sparke** of **Bennett Memorial School**, who produced a commanding response in this category. Joseph looked at the concept of 'hero' from a variety of angles, and drew the highly sophisticated conclusion that 'for different cultures there are entirely different credentials for what makes a hero'. On the way, he demonstrated an excellent knowledge and understanding of epic poetry. As Joseph himself admitted, there were digressions galore (on why the Romans told myths that promoted devotion and obedience; on how Christianity has shaped modern western views on heroism; and on what aspects of the ancient world appeal to people at different times in their life), but even the greatest ancient writers were masters of the fascinating digression; and, in the end, all of the strands came together wonderfully to make an honest, complex, and thoughtful conclusion.

## **c) HISTORY**

**'Ancient women made more of a difference to history than modern women ever have.'**  
**To what extent do you agree with this statement?**

*You should justify your answer with reference to at least two women from the Roman and/or Greek periods, and at least two from the 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Your chosen individuals should be taken from real life rather than from mythology.*

The provocative nature of the question, combined with the chance to bring together perspectives on the ancient and modern worlds, drew many candidates to this topic. There was a real chance here to create a wholly personal response, through the selection of examples that appealed to the individual candidate. Most grasped this opportunity with both hands: women under consideration ranged from Hypatia to Portia Catonis, and from Princess Diana to Graça Machel. The best answers structured their responses to allow direct comparison between individuals, often sorting them into pairs. The question also gave scope to discuss the changing roles of women through history, and several candidates made insightful, and often depressing, observations on this theme.

**Amber Dansoh, of Christ's Hospital,** took her reader on a fast-paced journey through gender politics throughout the ages, but never lost sight of the question. There were some fascinating details along the way, from the height of Gaulish women to the role of propaganda in shaping history. Her conclusion, that only in the very modern world have women been able to shape history, was a little dispiriting, but had the ring of truth about it.

The runner-up prize for the whole competition was taken by **James Lester of The Judd School.** James made his reader think, whether by reflecting on gender politics in the future or by comparing ancient attitudes to priestesses with modern attitudes to female bishops. He took a Roman-centric, and indeed highly political, approach, which allowed him to make telling asides that revealed ancient prejudices (Aristotle's view on human biology; the etymology of the word *virtus*) and to create a highly personal and searching answer.

#### **d) STORYTELLING**

##### **How relevant are the lessons of Aesop's Fables to the modern world?**

*In your answer you should relate Aesop's stories and their messages to modern events and individuals of your choosing. You may present in any format you wish (essay, discussion, drama, etc.)*

This question offered the opportunity to look with fresh eyes at a text that was, for many, their first experience of the classical world. On the evidence of the very small number of candidates that faced up to this challenge, Aesop is as relevant now as he has ever been, and may even offer suggestions on how to deal with present-day problems.

**Conor Stewart (Christ's Hospital)** was certainly able to find much in the modern world that would benefit from Aesop's wisdom. A real strength of his essay was how perceptive it was in seeing links between our world and Aesop's: between 'The Wolf in Sheep's Clothing' and the internet crime of 'catfishing'; between Brexit and 'The Frogs Who Wanted a King'; and even between Boris Johnson and 'Belling the Cat'. The parallels drawn were thought-provoking, and highlighted the potential of the ancient world to add fresh perspectives to well-worn debates.

**Evie Langford (Bennett Memorial School)** subjected the fables to psychological scrutiny, arguing why they appeal to children, why they have a relevance to the modern world, and

how they manage to explain universal truths without recourse to religion. In so doing, she offered some creative modern re-tellings of the stories, in which 'The Fox and the Grapes' became a tale about a window-shopper, and 'The Boy Who Cried Wolf' became a story about a juvenile security guard.

#### e) OLYMPIC GAMES

**An ancient Athenian has travelled in time to the modern Olympic Games. On returning to Athens, the time-traveller suggests changes to the ancient Olympic Games based on experiences at the modern Games.**

*You should present the time-traveller's findings in a format of your choosing (discussion, debate, play, etc.), along with recommended changes to the ancient Olympic Games.*

The time-travelling scenario involved in this question provided an opportunity for a creative approach; while the implied comparison between ancient and modern invited perceptive analysis of those two worlds. A pitfall to be avoided was the listing of facts about the Games (ancient and modern), without the evaluation inherent in the time-traveller's recommendations.

**Chloe O'Brien of New Hall School** told, in clear prose, the moving story of Tydeus, a time-travelling Athenian who visited the modern Olympics at a series of key points in their history. As a result, Tydeus was inspired to introduce increasingly radical changes to the Games of his own day: first, introducing medals; then, setting up a Paralympics, allowing married women to compete, and finally inventing the game of football for good measure. Chloe introduced both genuine emotion (the passion that Tydeus feels for the modern Games is touching) and sharp wit (such as the appropriately names Isocrates, who craves the same power as Tydeus) into this compelling piece of creative writing.

Maisie Howard of Christ's Hospital wrote about a similarly passionate time-traveller who was full of enthusiasm for the Winter Games, the Paralympics, and lycra. Maisie was particularly adept at including a host of references to the ancient games in an unobtrusive manner.

#### Prize-Winners 2016-17

##### Overall Winner

1	Joseph Sparke	Epic	Bennett Memorial School
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##### Distinction

2	James Lester	Women	The Judd School Tonbridge
3	Jasmin Rekhi	Gods	Burntwood School
4	Amber Dansoh	Women	Christ's Hospital School

**Merit**

5	Chloe O'Brien	Olympics	New Hall School, Boreham
6	Isabella Alcock	Gods	Burntwood School
7	Lucy Barrow	Gods	Christ's Hospital School
8	Imogen Rose Barrett-Mogilany	Women	St Benedict's School
9	Maxwell Singh-Kingdon	Women	Christ's Hospital School
10	Amy Bloomfield-Proud	Women	Christ's Hospital School

**Highly Commended** (listed in alphabetical order)

Alex Williams	Epic	Wetherby Prep School
Conor Stewart	Aesop	Christ's Hospital School
Erin Leahy	Gods	Bennet Memorial School
Evie Langford	Aesop	Bennett Memorial School
Katherine Linaker	Women	Christ's Hospital School
Manav Kakkanat	Women	The Judd School Tonbridge
Vedika Rastogi	Women	Christ's Hospital School

**Commended** (listed in alphabetical order)

Emily Corby	Gods	Bennett Memorial School
Leah Carpenter	Gods	Bennett Memorial School
Maisie Howard	Olympics	Christ's Hospital School
Mungo Mangat	Gods	The Judd School Tonbridge
Oliver Tomkinson	Epic	Bennett Memorial School
Rebecca Fenner	Women	Channing School
Remi-Marie Ladega-Chisholm	Women	Christ's Hospital School
Yasmina Mohamed	Women	Christ's Hospital School

**Competing Schools:**

Bennett Memorial School; The Judd School; Burntwood School; Christ's Hospital; New Hall School; St Benedict's School; Wetherby Preparatory School; Channing School; Malvern St James School; Ellesmere College; St Catherine's School Bramley.

Dr. J. E. Reeson

Bolton School Boys' Division

## JOWETT SENDELAR ESSAY COMPETITION 2017-18

Entries to be made by **31st January 2018** – please note the later **entry date**.

*For Year 9 and under: approximately 1500 – 2500 words. Illustrations (with captions) are welcome.*

### a) GODS

**Which can tell us more about Greek and Roman religion: written sources or physical artefacts?**

*You should compare the knowledge of the gods we get from writings such as Ovid's *Metamorphoses* with what we discover from temples, statues, and Greek pottery. You should include specific examples from both types of source, and reach a conclusion.*

### b) EPIC

**'Female characters in ancient Epic poetry contribute little to plot, themes, or characterisation'. To what extent do you agree with this statement?**

*Consider the importance of female characters in Epic. You should refer to a range of characters from at least two Epic poems (such as Homer's *Iliad*, Homer's *Odyssey*, and Virgil's *Aeneid*), and argue how important they are to the plot, themes, and characterisation of those poems.*

### c) HISTORY

**Was the eruption of Vesuvius in AD 79 a terrible tragedy, or should we be glad that it preserved Roman towns and villages for us to study?**

*You should consider what was terrible about the disaster, and also think about what modern knowledge of the ancient world gains from Pompeii, Herculaneum, and the other settlements and buildings preserved by the eruption. The accounts of the eruption by Pliny the Younger may be useful to you. You should present your findings in a format of your choosing (e.g. an essay, a drama, a letter, etc.).*

### d) TRAGEDY

**'Putting on Greek Tragedies in the modern world is a pointless act, since these plays have no relevance to a modern audience'. How far do you agree with this statement?**

*In your answer you should refer to at least two Greek tragedies, and consider to what extent they contain themes, characters, and plots that are relevant to modern culture.*

### e) SPORT

**Gladiator games were banned in AD 404. Should they have been banned sooner?**

*You should consider what was good and bad about gladiator games, and refer to specific examples of benefits and problems. You should reach a conclusion as to whether banning gladiators as entertainment would have been a good thing.*

### **Submission of entries for 2017-8 Competition**

- Candidates must put their **name, date of birth** and **school** on the FRONT COVER PAGE of their entries. This information should NOT be placed on the pages of the essay itself.
- The judges would like to see a bibliography or a list of the sources consulted. A word count should be given.
- Entries may be submitted electronically (preferably), or by post.
- The final date for entries is **31st January 2018**

### **Electronic Submission**

Entries should be submitted in Microsoft Word format only. Please do not use difficult fonts (e.g. all capitals).

Entries should be emailed as attachments to [jowettsendelar@boltonschool.org](mailto:jowettsendelar@boltonschool.org) with the email subject 'Jowett Sendelar Competition Entry 2015'. Please include the address of your school in the email for the mailing of any prizes awarded.

### **By Post**

Entries MUST be in A4 paper format, printed or written, in black or blue ink. Please do not use difficult fonts (e.g. all capitals).

Please attach a stamped addressed envelope for the return of scripts, reports and any prizes.